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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the Peer Resource Program established by Harcum Junior College. It is designed to provide, in addition to professional guidance personnel, student peer leadership and student personnel services to other students. The approach is based on the assumption that adolescents are generally more responsive to peer influences, pressures and controls. The program trained 26 students in communication skills, interpersonal skills, decision-making and group dynamics. The trained students then received resource materials for referral and informational purposes. The students so trained consider themselves mediators between students and faculty. The program has been in operation for one semester and appears to fulfill student needs. (NG)

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# HARCUM'S PEER RESOURCE PROGRAM

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## Harcum's Peer Resource Program

One of Harcum Junior College's purposes is...."to prepare students to take their chosen places in today's world equipped not only with necessary academic and career skills, but also with self and social awareness". As Harcum's president, Dr. Michael A. Duzy, has recently reiterated: "concern for the education of students is not limited to the formal, academic relationship of the lecture room. The college makes every effort to extend this personal concern to the non-academic life of the student by doing its utmost to make student life on the campus a positive and worthwhile educational experience."

One dimension to implement this concern and policy is a Peer Resource Program (PRP) which has been established by the college. In addition to competent, professional guidance personnel, this program has been set up to develop and utilize student peer leadership, and to help in the delivery of student personnel services to other students. In essence, this means utilizing students to help other students.

The peer group approach is based on the assumption that adolescents in many instances are responsive to peer influences, pressures, and controls when adult (faculty and/or staff) efforts fail to reach them. Many times, students relate better to other students than to faculty or staff members. Frequently it is easier for students to identify and emphasize with each other on an intellectual and feeling level because of the similarity of values, concerns, interests, and goals with which they seek to cope--effectively. Also, it can be easier for students to trust one another because they perceive each other to have genuinely helpful, non-professional motives, wherein they may suspect adults of wanting to control their actions.

In launching this program, some twenty-six students were selected to receive training from professionally-qualified personnel. Communication skills (especially listening), interpersonal skills, the decision-making process, and low key group dynamics to discover potential for increased personal satisfaction and achievement have been included in this training program, along with specific knowledge needed to provide referral information.

Each PRP student receives a packet containing such resource materials as the college catalog, list of varied referral services and books to be loaned to students for reference in their particular problem areas. These referral aids cover a broad spectrum of concerns--where to seek help in study skills, academic and vocational needs, roommate difficulties, anxiety, depression, sexual concerns, drug and alcohol awareness, recreation, entertainment, and travel suggestions.

The specific goals of the PRP program, wherein students help other students, have included:

1 - gain an awareness of self and develop more positive feelings
2 - understand the interaction of relationships
3 - develop sensitivity to own and other's feelings
4 - develop skill of talking comfortably to a peer about concerns, needs, and values

5 - understand difference between being a "Big Ear" and advice-giving
6 - deal with day-to-day problems more constructively
7 - explore ways of functioning more effectively at Harcum
8 - improve use of school and community resources

In the words of one Peer Resource Program student..."We are considered to be a type of mediator between the faculty and students. We serve as an objective point of view for those students who feel they would rather not discuss their particular problem with a member of the faculty.

Realistically-speaking, each and all of the 9 listed goals have not yet reached the same level of development-acheivement. The program having been in operation but one full semester, this is entirely understandable. However, what has been abundantly evident is the fact that a student-felt need been apparent in this peer-counseling area. To date, it has been a "well-used" service. Although fewer commuter students have utilized the service (quite understandable since these students are not making Harcum their "home-away-from-home"), they have called upon the three commuter-student PRP's and utilized the information provided on the speical bulletin board for PRP notices.

It is generally agreed that greater ease and success in relating with others will enhance a student's self-image and result in a more positive and productive attitude toward self, others, college, and home. The Peer Resource Program is considered to be proactive rather than reactive to student problems. This program can, and does, help shape positive attitudes in Harcum students, and encourages them to avoid some of the difficulties in which they have found themselves in the past.

In very practical terms--as stated by one PRP student, "a student who may need one of the services can use them without anyone bugging her about her name, etc.--they are concerned with that student's well-being."

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